

REMARKS

Pursuant to the present amendment, claims 1, 14 and 17 have been amended, claims 3-5 have been canceled, and new claim 37 has been added. Thus, claims 1-2, 6-8, 11-15, 17-19, 22, 24-30 and 32-37 are pending in the present application. No new matter has been introduced by way of the present amendment. Reconsideration of the present application is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 22, 24-30 and 32-36 were allowed. New dependent claim 37 has been added to further define the invention set forth in allowed independent claim 36. It is believed that new dependent claim 37 is allowable for at least this reason.

Claim 17 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112 due to an error in the dependency of that claim. Pursuant to the present amendment, claim 17 has been amended to reflect that it now depends from claim 14. Withdrawal of the § 112 rejection is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 1-5 and 11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by Munk '182 (U.S. Patent No. 6,746,182). Claims 1-8, 11-15, 18 and 19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 as allegedly being anticipated by Munk '336 (U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0009336). Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's rejections.

Pursuant to the present amendment, claim 1 has been amended to recite that the bushing comprises a plurality of wear inserts positioned to bear against the keel joint. This limitation was previously set forth in now-canceled dependent claim 3. It is respectfully submitted that amended independent claim 1 is in condition for immediate allowance.

In rejecting dependent claim 3, the Office Action did not contain any specific identification of the structure in Munk '182 that the Examiner believes corresponds to the claimed wear inserts. The undersigned has reviewed the disclosure of Munk '182 and cannot find any structure that would correspond to the claimed wear inserts. Respectfully, it is believed that Munk '182 fails to disclose at least this element of the claimed combination now recited in amended claim 1. Should the Examiner maintain this rejection, a citation to the express disclosure of Munk '182 where such structure is found would be greatly appreciated.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that amended claim 1 is not anticipated by Munk '182. Moreover, there is no suggestion in the art of record to modify the teachings of Munk '182 so as to arrive at Applicants' invention. A recent Federal Circuit case makes it crystal clear that, in an obviousness situation, the prior art must disclose each and every element of the claimed invention, and that any motivation to combine or modify the prior art must be based upon a suggestion in the prior art. *In re Lee*, 61 U.S.P.Q.2d 143 (Fed. Cir. 2002). Conclusory statements regarding common knowledge and common sense are insufficient to support a finding of obviousness. *Id.* at 1434-35. It is respectfully submitted that any attempt to assert that the invention defined by independent claim 1 is obvious in view of the prior art of record constitutes an impermissible use of hindsight using Applicants' disclosure as a roadmap. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 1, 2, 6-8 and 11-13 are in condition for immediate allowance.

It is also respectfully submitted that Munk '336 does not anticipate claims 1, 2, 6-8 and 11-13 for similar reasons – it does not disclose the wear inserts now set forth in amended independent claim 1. As with the previous reference, the Office Action did not include a specific

citation to any disclosed structure in Munk '336 that corresponds to the claimed wear inserts. The undersigned cannot identify any such structure. Should the Examiner maintain this rejection, it is respectfully requested that the Examiner provide a specific citation to the disclosure in Munk '336 wherein the claimed wear inserts are allegedly disclosed. Accordingly, it is believed that Munk '336 does not anticipate nor render obvious the inventions defined in claims 1, 2, 6-8 and 11-13.

The Examiner's asserted that Munk '336 allegedly anticipated claims 1-8, 11-15, 18 and 19. Applicants' respectfully disagree. Munk '336 is fundamentally different from the claims for many reasons. Among other things, independent claims 1 and 14 recite (1) a keel joint, (2) a keel guide, and (3) a bushing. Of course, these independent claims contain additional limitations.

In the Office Action, the Examiner did not specifically identify which structures corresponded to these three, very basic limitations. The Examiner only stated that "Munk discloses the claimed invention for landing a riser joint within a keel guide. A plurality of clamp/lock down assemblies are provided to prevent linear movement of the joint through the keel guide." Office Action at p. 3 (emphasis added). Simply put, Munk '336 is not directed to a keel guide-keel joint assembly at all. As indicated by the Examiner, the system in Munk '336 prevents linear movement of the joint through the keel guide. As indicated in the background section of the present application, keel guides are used to restrain lateral movement of the riser. Risers are permitted to move vertically within the keel guide to compensate for motion of the vessel or platform. Specification at p. 1, ll. 8-16. Munk '182, the Examiner's other reference,

acknowledges that keel guides allow the riser to move upwardly and downwardly within the keel guide. Munk '182, Col. 1, ll. 56-67.

Again, it is unclear what structure the Examiner contends corresponds to the keel joint and the keel guide. Perhaps the Examiner is referring to the riser hanger 40 as the keel joint and the receptacle 14 as the keel guide. However, if this is the structure the Examiner was referred to, such structures do not anticipate claim 1 or 14 for a variety of reasons. In operation, the riser 12 is secured within the receptacle 14. Munk '336, ¶¶ 34-36. A specific sequence is provided to disassemble this connection. ¶ 37. It is unclear what structure in Munk '336 the Examiner contends is the bushing as set forth in independent claims 1 and 14. Thus, for at least this reason, it is respectfully submitted that Munk '336 does not anticipate independent claim 1 or 14 or any claims dependent therefrom.

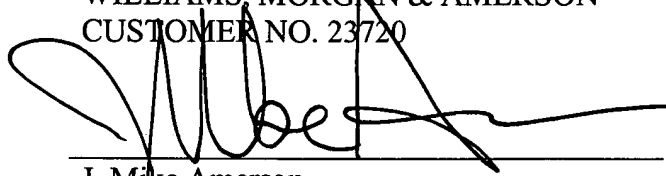
Additionally, independent claim 14 has been specifically amended to recite that the bushing allows sliding movement of the keel joint within the bushing. By the Examiner's own admission, Munk '336 does not disclose at least this limitation. Moreover, there is no suggestion to modify the teachings of Munk '336 so as to arrive at Applicants' invention as recited in amended claim 14. *In re Lee*, 61 U.S.P.Q.2d 143 (Fed. Cir. 2002). Conclusory statements regarding common knowledge and common sense are insufficient to support a finding of obviousness. *Id.* at 1434-35. It is respectfully submitted that any attempt to assert that the invention defined by independent claim 1 is obvious in view of the prior art of record constitutes an impermissible use of hindsight using Applicants' disclosure as a roadmap.

It view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that all pending claims are in condition for immediate allowance. The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney

at (713) 934-4055 with any questions, comments or suggestions relating to the referenced patent application.

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Mike Amerson', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with large loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Date: August 19, 2005

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